



# INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT LEARNING

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## FALL 2017 HIMAT UPDATE

To the Friends and Supporters of the Himat Initiative

### Introduction

The Himat Indigenous Leadership and Development Program is a peace-building-through-poverty-alleviation initiative working in the high Himalayan villages and towns of the Hunza region located in the northernmost tip of Pakistan, bordering Afghanistan, China and Tajikistan. Much of this harsh and beautiful place is above the tree line and surrounded by some of the highest mountains in the world.

A primary objective of the Himat initiative is to build the capacity of grassroots leaders and local institutions to promote the sustainable social and economic development of the people and communities in the region without the long-term support of outside programs.

Our project now works with roughly 120 communities, mostly consisting of small, remote villages, but now also including the urban centres of Karimabad and Aliabad. This work is carried out by five full-time professional staff and four part-time village-level women animators, all of whom are from the local area.



### Five Key Strategies

1. **Ignite and nurture a spark of hope and a vision of possibility** for a better life
2. **Build the capacity of grassroots people and leaders** for success in development through intensive training and mentoring
3. **Strengthen local and area institutions** to provide leadership and coordination for development that is inclusive of everyone in the communities, including the poorest of the poor, women, youth, farmers, entrepreneurs, business and professional leaders, religious leaders, government officials, etc.
4. **Support the preparation of comprehensive community development plans** made by and for grassroots people and coordinated by the local area institutions
5. **Support development "quick wins"** such as the emergence of micro businesses, social enterprises and other community initiatives through which community members make a significant change in their quality of life by working together through seed funding coupled with extensive community support and mentoring.

### Highlights of Accomplishments

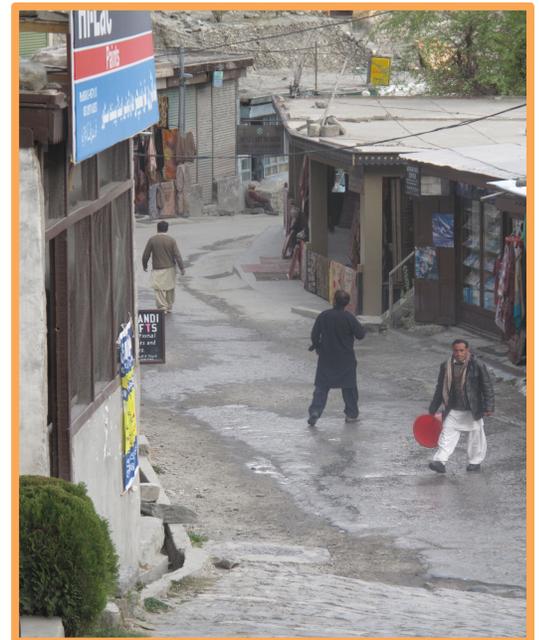
- 12,000 grassroots people have taken Himat Development Leadership Training courses (nine separate courses are now offered)

- Approximately 250 grassroots development institutions (including women's councils, village councils and cluster councils) have been strengthened and continue to receive support
- Five development districts out of nine have completed extensive community development planning
- More than 50 savings and loans programs have emerged, including several regional community banks (like credit unions) in a region where a few years ago most people had no access whatsoever to credit and other financial services
- Roughly 400 micro businesses have emerged where almost none existed before, and many of them have rapidly grown into prospering enterprises
- A Farmers Alliance is now working to increase agricultural profits by reducing the cost of inputs and increasing profits through collective buying and selling
- Without outside funding, a community-driven program to help the poorest of the poor is moving marginalized and disadvantaged families out of chronic poverty and dependency

These are just highlights, but they can give you an idea of the sort of outcomes that are occurring as a result of seven years of generous support from Canadians and hard work on the ground by local people. The greatest outcome is that there are now hundreds of trained and engaged grassroots people working together to improve the social and economic wellbeing of their families and their communities.

### New Contexts; New Challenges

It's never so simple as "poor" and "not poor". There are many complexities and new challenges emerging, and still many marginalized families that have not yet been reached by the project, particularly in central and southern Hunza where we have been working for a shorter time, but also where the culture of modernity is eroding the people's sense of collective identity and capacity to work together for the benefit of everyone. The individualization of wealth and poverty make someone else's poverty "not my problem", and makes it "normal" and "natural" to enrich yourself by ensuring that the poor stay poor so they can be easily manipulated for your benefit. In this context, real community development progress is certainly possible, but it is more difficult. It takes intensive dialogue with the leaders of thought within many diverse circles that constitute urban areas in order to begin a true movement that will lead to the sustainable prosperity and security of all.



### What doesn't kill you...

We have not been able to visit the project on the ground during this calendar year. We applied for a visa in April and have been waiting ever since. Of course, we made inquiries, but nobody at the Pakistan Consulate in Vancouver could tell us anything. We found out today that the Ministry of the Interior in Islamabad (where the visa has to be approved) can find no record of that application. Who knows what happened between the Vancouver Consular office and the bureaucracy in Islamabad, but that's a five-month delay. During all this time, we have been holding very regular conference calls with the team on the ground and supporting the management of the project from a distance. It's not been ideal or easy, but it's working.

In fact, it's forced our team on the ground to mature and to step up to the plate more than they ever had before in terms of taking responsibility for continuously improving the important work that's happening on the ground. Following is a summary of some of the exciting new developments that are underway.

### Summary of New Developments

1. **Reaching the hard-to-reach by focusing on women:** Community leaders told us that we have managed to activate and train about 30% of the total adult population who are now very much engaged in development activities. This is actually a huge accomplishment rarely achieved, but while 30% is a pretty big number, it isn't good enough. They advised us that the way to reach the other 70% is to target and build the capacity of the women. Please note that mostly male leaders are telling us that "if you activate the women, they will activate the rest of us".

So, that's what we're doing. A new training and mobilization campaign is drilling down deep in every community in our region to bring more and more women into the circle of those engaged in the development process. This is happening through extensive training and a new wave of livelihood activities focused on women.

2. **Shifting the responsibility for community animation from the Himat Team to local leaders and institutions:** When local leaders challenged the Himat team not to be satisfied with engaging 30% of the population, but instead to go after the other 70%, our team put a challenge back to the leaders. "We have worked closely with you for the past 3 to 5 years to build your capacity for leadership. Now it's time for you to exercise that leadership by engaging the grassroots people in the villages of your own clusters. We will work with you, but there are 60,000 people to be mobilized, and only five of us. You are going to have to help." The leaders readily accepted the challenge, but now a steep learning curve comes into play as our team walks alongside of leaders and encourages them, but refuses to do their work for them. If the leaders want support for their plans, they need to engage their grassroots community members in learning and action processes. This is because, if the engaged community consists of trained human resources that have been motivated and prepared for development work, the results leading to success are going to be multiplied many fold, as past experience has shown in these very same communities. This exciting shift is now ongoing but, in most areas, will take some time to fully realize its potential.



3. **Learning to mobilize in urban areas:** In remote rural communities, there is one village organization, one women's organization in each locality, and 10 to 15 villages are clustered together to be served by one local support organization (i.e., cluster council representatives from all the villages). Community members are almost universally connected to their local organizations, and therefore activating local organizations is a good way to mobilize communities. It's quite different in urban areas, however. The population is not culturally homogeneous. There are members of different language groups and religions. People are organized in many different ways. There are dozens of associations that bind people together, and so mobilizing grassroots people in urban and peri-urban areas requires working through all of these different channels. Developing a comprehensive community development

plan in such an environment requires bringing together many different kinds of stakeholders, listening to them very carefully, and artfully weaving together their needs and interests so that everyone benefits from the outcomes of community planning. Similarly, to bring people into training and mobilization groups requires finding them and recruiting them from many different base contexts.

This year, more than any other, our team has had to adopt a humble posture of learning about this kind of mobilization, and of course everyone is still learning, but visible progress is being made. What is so challenging for our team is that they have experienced huge success in the past, but they can't simply do what they did before, because the context is so very different. So, they need to learn their way into success all over again in this new situation, which takes humility, wisdom and persistence, especially for seasoned professionals who would like to believe that they've already paid their dues.

4. ***The Himat LifePath program aimed at the poorest of the poor is having remarkable success***, but mostly that success is happening in areas where certain key factors are present. Strong local leadership is required, consisting of individuals who thoroughly understand the intricacies of supporting the poorest families and the importance of mobilizing the wider community to help in that process. Without such "spark plugs" who fully understand the process and advocate for the poorest with the rest of the community, things don't progress nearly as well.

For example, in one community, a group of 6 to 8 "deserving women" formed a company and bid on a contract to apply the plaster on the walls of a traditional building for a new hotel complex. Everyone said that this would be difficult and technical work, and that women could never do it. But these women believed in themselves (something that came out of the training and the support they have been receiving), and so they applied anyway. They got the job, and they did it extremely well, marshaling praise from hundreds of kilometres away as "pioneer women" who had accomplished a great thing. Of course, everyone valued the recovery of traditional construction approaches, because cultural recovery is seen as extremely important. But they also valued that this achievement was accomplished by women, which was completely new within that tradition. And, the women earned more money than they had ever before earned in their lives. The challenge now is to help other communities to learn how to support their "deserving families".



5. ***The five key strategies are still being implemented in every context, but how this is being done is continually evolving***: As the project moves into more culturally and religiously diverse areas, the five key strategies (inspire a spark of hope, build capacity, strengthen institutions, make community plans, and support practical projects) are just as important and relevant as they ever were, but how they can be effectively implemented changes with each context.

The Himat initiative has enjoyed considerable success in the areas where it has been piloted in Hunza, but we now are poised to begin implementing the project in other areas of the Pakistan, and clearly each of these new areas will have its own unique set of conditions and circumstances. Opportunities are opening up, and it's only a matter of time before all the

factors that will make this possible will be in place (viable partners, a receptive population, adequate funding, etc.).

It was always a goal of Himat to create a viable model for development mobilization, and once the model had proven itself, to take it to other (sometimes more difficult) areas of the country. We are still on track to do that. We hope to be able to make an announcement about such new developments very soon.

### Thank You

We are most grateful to have you walking alongside of us on this journey. For us, it is sometimes lonely work, and there's a lot of it over many days in a year. But, when we think of you, we are heartened by the strength of your unflagging kindness and generosity, and by the sustaining support of helping hands that so many of you continue to give in so many ways. And, we remind ourselves why we are doing this—which is to contribute to a more peaceful and sustainable world. And what a wonderful gift that is, to be able to make contribution to a better world.

Warm regards and blessings,  
Judie and Michael